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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7521  
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1147  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4694  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8235  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5797  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1565  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1554  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000337

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO  
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/09/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: BURMA: THAN SHWE IS THE PROBLEM

REF: RANGOON 333

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A businessman and a journalist with close ties to the regime told Emboffs that all roads lead to Senior General Than Shwe, who remains isolated and unaware of the scale of the catastrophe that has befallen his country. No one will approve visas for international humanitarian assistance workers without his direct approval. The military and bureaucracy remain paralyzed with fear. Meanwhile, in the absence of resources and capacity to address the growing humanitarian disaster, GOB ministers have ordered regime cronies to provide commodities and money for the assistance effort. The cronies are quickly draining their savings and assets, so they have put pressure on Rangoon "viceroy" Myint Swe to allow international assistance and humanitarian workers into Burma. End Summary.

¶2. (C) After a May 7 Buddhist donation ceremony attended by LT GEN Myint Swe (Chief of Bureau of Special Operations 5, Rangoon Division) and several regime cronies, the businessmen launched a verbal assault on the general, demanding that international aid workers be allowed into the country. The cronies complained that, in absence of international assistance, they had to provide commodities and money for the relief effort on a scale that was quickly draining their assets. Tay Myint, Chairman of the Myanmar Fisheries Federation, has already been forced to donate USD 1.5 million. As a reward for his generosity, he and crony Chit Kaing were awarded licenses to import 600,000 sheets of corrugated iron to sell for roof repairs.

¶3. (C) Despite the cronies' pleading with Myint Swe, no high-level government officials have dared to frankly describe the full scope of the disaster to the Senior General, our sources told us. Unpleasant pictures in the media reportedly make the Senior General retreat even further into isolation. According to our contacts, Than Shwe is above all concerned with saving face and holding on to power. He does not want the Burma Army to be seen as needing assistance to deliver relief, and would rather let thousands of Burmese die than accept massive international assistance. Only donations of commodities have been approved so far. Our

contacts emphasized that Than Shwe remained worried about a U.S. invasion and determined to hold on to power for the last few years of his life.

¶4. (C) Businessman and aquaculture expert Tin Maung Thann told us he had been contacted this morning by upset officials at the Thai and Singapore Embassies, who informed him the military had refused their governments' offer to provide medical relief and helicopter operations in the Delta. Thai telecommunications company AIS reportedly offered to set up emergency cell phone communications in the Delta to assist the relief efforts and was turned down because the lead engineer was a Japanese national.

¶5. (C) The senior generals will not even allow a full Burma Army response, according to our sources. LT GEN Myint Swe reportedly had a four-division strong rescue team ready to deploy to the Delta, but third-ranking General Thura Shwe Mann ordered him to stand down after a hastily called meeting in Nay Pyi Taw with Than Shwe and Maung Aye. Meanwhile, PM Thein Sein and the eight ministers on the national rescue committee reportedly have become more desperate. Sources told us Thein Sein expressed fear to Thura Shwe Mann that 60,000 had lost their lives already and up to 300,000 could, if water, food, and medicine were not delivered quickly.

¶6. (C) Our businessman and journalist contacts pleaded with the U.S. to request the Chinese to send a high-level emissary to speak to Than Shwe regarding the gravity of the situation, and to urge him to let in international humanitarian experts.

Our contacts doubted that Ban Ki Moon's message to Than Shwe had even been delivered to him (reftel), as no one dared push up any bad news to the Senior General. Only the Chinese know how to make sure their messages are delivered, they

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explained. The Chinese send their messages in writing and insist on reading them in Burmese only to the Senior General himself. It is the only way to make sure a message is truly delivered to Than Shwe, they stressed.

¶7. (C) Comment: Than Shwe's isolation and paranoia know no bounds. All fingers point to him as the obstacle to delivering the humanitarian assistance the Burmese so desperately need, just like he is the obstacle to an inclusive political dialogue. Our many contacts are visibly distraught as they watch Burma's humanitarian catastrophe worsen by the day because of the intransigence of Than Shwe. The question is who is brave enough to shunt Than Shwe aside?

Most Burmese tell us no one. Other senior officials may passively sit while thousands needlessly die rather than challenge Than Shwe. End comment.

VILLAROSA